

FCS11- Procedure for Evidence Handling

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1. Scope

- 1.1. To describe the guidelines for the handling of evidence in the Forensic Chemistry Unit (FCU) of the Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS)

2. Background

- 2.1. To establish the practices for documenting the handling and receipt of evidence to conform to the requirements of the Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS) Forensic Chemistry Unit (FCU) *Quality Assurance Manual*, the accreditation standards under ISO/IEC 17025:2017, and any supplemental standards.

3. Safety

- 3.1. Read Material Safety Data Sheets to determine the safety hazards for chemicals and reagents used in the standard operating procedures.
- 3.2. Wear personal protective equipment (e.g., lab coat, gloves, mask, eye protection), when carrying out standard operating procedures.
- 3.3. Note, when handling items that are suspect to contain fentanyl, or fentanyl analog, perform accessioning in fume hood is advised when possible. If the substance is powder or has the potential for aerosolization, then the item shall be accessioned and sampled in the fume hood.

4. Materials Required

- 4.1. Tamper-indicating evidence tape
- 4.2. Heat seal bags
- 4.3. Heat seal machine

5. Standards and Controls

- 5.1. Not applicable

6. Calibration

- 6.1. Not applicable

7. Procedures

7.1. Submission of Evidence

7.1.1. Prior to submission of evidence, the submitting agency shall transmit a *FCU Analysis Request* form to the FCU Manager, Lead Chemist and DFS.FCURequests@dc.gov.

7.1.1.1. Prior to submitting evidence, the submitting agency shall notify / clarify if the evidence has any:

7.1.1.1.1. Hazards (chemical or biological)

7.1.1.1.2. Special handling instructions (needles or sharps)

- **Note:** For safety reasons, it is the policy of the FCU to dispose all needles or sharps after processing evidence. A small sample of secondary evidence will be retained if requested by the submitter.

7.1.1.1.3. Perishables

- **Note:** It is the policy of the FCU to destroy all perishable evidence after 90 days of receipt. A small sample of secondary evidence will be retained if requested by the submitter.

7.1.2. Evidence to be analyzed by the FCU is received from law enforcement agencies or those otherwise associated with the judicial system.

7.1.2.1. To ensure accountability of evidence, whenever possible, evidence shall not be directly delivered to the FCU staff, but first submitted to Central Evidence Unit (CEU) staff and be entered into the Laboratory Information management system (LIMS).

- 7.1.2.2. Where practicable, perishables shall be received at a specified time with support of FCU staff present to receive evidence and transfer to FCU storage (room 2118).
- 7.1.2.3. The FCU cannot receive large or exceedingly bulk evidence, as evaluated on a case-by case basis by the FCU Manager, or designee.
- 7.1.2.4. When possible, only a sample (5mg or 5mL) is taken from evidence and submitted to the FCU for analysis by the submitting agency.
- 7.1.2.5. The FCU is not designed to house long-term storage or bulk Controlled Dangerous Substance (CDS) evidence. The items of evidence shall be returned in a timely manner to the submitting agency after analysis is complete.
- 7.1.3. Items received by the FCU shall be under a seal to protect the item(s) from cross-contamination and ensure safety of laboratory personnel.
 - 7.1.3.1. When practicable, the items shall be placed under a heat seal.
 - 7.1.3.2. When practicable, include initials and date across seal.
- 7.2. Receiving Evidence
 - 7.2.1. It is the responsibility of the analyst to maintain the integrity of the evidence at all times while in his/her custody. All evidence must be protected from loss, cross-transfer, contamination and/or deleterious change.
 - 7.2.2. All evidence received is to be assigned by the FCU Manager or Lead Chemist, and must be documented as follows:
 - 7.2.2.1. The analyst will examine the evidence container(s) to ensure that proper seal(s) are in place. A proper seal is one in which there is no possibility that the contents of a container can be removed, altered or a substitution made without the seal being obviously disturbed.
 - 7.2.2.2. Receipt of evidence will be documented at the time of transfer either electronically or on paper as part of the chain of custody.
 - 7.2.2.3. Each outer container (bag, envelope, box, *etc.*) shall be marked with a unique case identifier and the analyst's initials. The outer container is usually an evidence envelope, but it can be anything that contains exhibits for a case. In addition, an item designator is used with the unique case identifier to distinguish items within a case.
 - 7.2.2.4. A submission form, such as the *FCU Analysis Request*, shall be filled out for all controlled substance evidence submitted. If a submission form is not available, pertinent information such as the

agency case number, suspect name(s), or a description of the evidence submitted may be obtained from available sources or by contacting the officer directly.

7.2.2.5. All exhibits within a case will be inventoried and compared with the documentation on the submission form (or equivalent). The analyst will itemize the actual evidence received and include the following information:

7.2.2.5.1. The unique case identifier, the start date for the inventory of the listed parent item(s), and analyst initials.

7.2.2.5.2. A description of the exhibits within a case along with the corresponding sub-item number. The descriptors can include color, material type, package type, size, and count. Sub-items will be grouped based on the appearance of the packaging, contents, and analytical scheme.

7.2.2.5.3. The use of abbreviations is acceptable as long as they are commonly used or are included in the Abbreviations section.

7.2.2.5.4. For large numbers of sub-items, it is acceptable to describe them as numerous instead of determining an actual count.

7.2.2.6. If there are significant discrepancies in submission documentation or with evidence received, then the Lead Chemist or FCU Manager shall be notified as soon as possible. Discrepancies may include mismatched suspect names, incorrect agency case numbers, or apparent missing evidence. In such cases the discrepancies and attempts to clarify them through available information will be documented as part of the case file.

7.2.2.7. It is sometimes necessary to contact the submitting officer to determine the cause of a discrepancy. If discrepancies with evidence need to be corrected by the submitting officer, then the evidence condition will be documented by the receiving analyst and verified by the FCU Manager or Lead Chemist. If appropriate, the evidence will be returned to the submitting agency for correction before analysis proceeds.

7.2.2.8. All exhibits contained within a case shall be labeled with the analyst's initials and the unique case identifier and item designators. In a case with numerous small items grouped together, such as small ziplocks, the exhibits may be placed in a container such as a ziplock on which the analyst has placed the unique case identifier and item designators and his/her initials. If during testing a difference is noted, then the small items will be grouped appropriately and analyzed and labeled separately.

7.3. Cases Containing Possible Biohazards

7.3.1. Cases that contain items that could represent a possible biohazard to the analyst require special handling. While working with possible biohazards, proper precautions should be taken including wearing gloves, lab coat, and safety glasses, and taking extra care not to touch any part of your body, especially your face. If your work area should become contaminated, wash the area thoroughly with dilute bleach. Avoid touching uncontaminated surfaces (such as telephones, doorknobs, *etc.*) with soiled gloves. If you work in the hood, clean thoroughly with dilute bleach when you are finished. Whenever possible use disposable beakers, pipettes, Kimwipes, *etc.* and dispose in the biohazard container. Anything that is not disposable and has come in contact with bodily fluids needs to be washed with a solution of dilute bleach.

7.3.2. Some items that require special handling are the following:

7.3.2.1. Syringes - remove any exposed needles with the needle cutters. If the syringe needs to be analyzed, then the analyst should determine if the needle should be removed before the analysis begins or wait until after the analysis is completed. If the syringe is not exposed (capped, received in an appropriate biohazard container), then it is not necessary to remove the needle. See *FCS04 - SOP for Safe Handling and Analysis for CDS in Syringes* for guidance.

7.3.2.2. Latex pellets or anything else removed from the stomach or lower bowel - in the hood wash the pellets with a bleach solution while wearing double gloves, when practicable. All preliminary weighing and sampling of the pellet contents is done in the hood. When you are finished handling the pellets, place them in a ziplock bag. Clean the hood area with dilute bleach solution.

7.3.2.3. Items contaminated with blood or items identified as removed from a body cavity, the toilet, groin, crotch area, *etc.* could represent a biohazard and should be handled accordingly.

7.4. Return of Evidence to the Submitting Agency

7.4.1. All items and sub-items within a case will be packaged to protect from loss, cross-transfer, and/or deleterious change. Whenever possible, evidence will be repackaged in the same condition as it was received.

7.4.2. If evidence needs to be repackaged (for example, containers are leaking or to assist with viewing in court) all containers added by an analyst will be labeled to indicate that they were not part of the original submission, where practicable.

- 7.4.3. Before evidence is sealed, the contents will be checked to ensure that it is properly labeled with the analyst's initials, the unique case identifier, and item designators.
- 7.4.4. Outer evidence containers will be sealed and the seal labeled with the analyst's initials and date before being returned to the submitting agency.
- 7.4.5. Note – if biohazardous evidence is to be returned to the customer, then appropriate biohazard labels shall be present on the outermost container.

8. Sampling

- 8.1. N/A

9. Calculations

- 9.1. N/A

10. Uncertainty of Measurement

- 10.1. N/A

11. Limitations

- 11.1. N/A

12. Documentation

- 12.1. FCU Request for Analysis
- 12.2. FCU Sample Log, electronic or paper version

13. References

- 13.1. FCU Quality Assurance Manual (Current Version)
- 13.2. FCU SOPs (Current Versions)
- 13.3. Controlled Substances Standard Operating Procedures, Document FAD-CS-SOP, Forensic Science Center, Houston, Texas